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A summary of a series of studies of the summer program of the University of Minnesota undertaken to determine more precisely the current role of the summer session. Discusses characteristics of summer session students, reasons for attendance, faculty characteristics, faculty and student appraisals of summer session courses, and types of courses provided.

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The University Summer Session: An Appendage or Part of the Whole?

JOHN E. STECKLEIN, MARY CORCORAN, and E. W. ZIEBARTH

THREE AVENUES of approach can be distinguished in the summer session programs of American colleges and universities. Some institutions continue their academic-year instructional program during the summer period; others offer special study opportunities at this time that are not part of their academic-year program; and many do both. It is easy to see then that summer programs today differ considerably in the extent to which they function as an integral part of the total education program of the institution or as a supplement with but a few connecting ties to the academic-year program.

In the early years of many summer sessions the latter situation prevailed, the "extra" or "special" offerings and activities dominated the curriculum, and "regular" courses were few. Many sessions, for instance, were started as training programs for teachers who believed, or could be encouraged by their hiring boards to believe, that they should spend some part of their vacation period studying. Other programs had their origins in summer field expeditions, marine laboratories, or similar off-campus programs conducted to take advantage of the season's opportunities for outdoor studies. Administratively, too, early summer programs were often only loosely associated with the parent college or university, being in fact private ventures of a few faculty members.

The summer sessions, now conducted by almost 1,300 collegiate level institutions in this country, typically offer much more comprehensive programs than they formerly did and their ties with the rest of the institution are generally closer. In somewhat more than 100 institutions, summer sessions are now scheduled as fourth quarters.[1]

[1] The most recent figures are for the summer of 1955 when 1,266, or 68.1 per cent, of the nation's 1,858 colleges and universities offered a summer program. Most of these institutions scheduled one or more summer sessions, but 116 scheduled a fourth quarter. See "Statistics of Higher Education: 1955-56, Faculty, Students, and Degrees," Chapter 4, Section 1, *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States: 1954-56*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1958, p. 41.

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So, although summer sessions today are still viewed as separate operations by most of the institutions that conduct them, they have become an integral part of the academic-year calendar in some places.

To the extent that the separate summer session program tends to be more flexible than a fourth quarter or other more integrated program, it may afford greater possibilities for enriching and extending the total program of the institution. Departments have been more willing to experiment with special types of courses in such summer programs, courses that differ from academic-year offerings in organization of subject matter or in the manner in which they are presented. Field courses in biology and geology, for example, capitalize on the season's advantages for outdoor work. Workshops and institutes for teachers and other groups have been featured in summer programs. Outstanding faculty members from other institutions are also often available during the summer for visiting lectureships. At the same time, some members of the regular faculty prefer to be free of academic responsibilities during this season so that they may concentrate on research and writing, travel, or teach at some other institution themselves. Although an integrated program may also have these same features, they are perhaps more difficult to achieve under such circumstances.

There is on the other hand a greater likelihood that the separate summer session program will fail to contribute as much as it might to the total effectiveness of the institution, because its planning may not be well co-ordinated with that of the academic-year program. With rare exceptions, too, the separate summer sessions must rely almost entirely on student fees for support, a situation which sometimes results in an excessive concern about immediate student demands and too little attention to program balance in the planning of summer course work. There are signs of change in this respect, however. Concern about the number of years that students now spend in preparation for certain professions has led some administrators to question seriously the advisability of encouraging college students to spend summers in vacation, or to take jobs unrelated to their professional goals, when the continuation of study during the summer periods would enable them to enter their professional life work at an earlier age than they do now. The waste in allowing expensive physical plants to lie idle or to be used in only a limited way for one-fourth

of the year is emphasized by others. The proper place of summer instruction in a college or university program is thus a topic of current discussion.

II

To determine more precisely the current role of its summer session, as a basis for such considerations, the University of Minnesota has recently completed an extensive series of studies of its summer program. Certain of the general findings of these studies may be of value to other institutions, both as descriptive of the nature of a large university summer program today, and for comparison with their own summer programs.[2]

The three major components of the summer program—the students, the faculty, and the courses offered—were studied in detail for the 1956 summer session. The scope of these three studies is indicated by the questions used as guides in planning them:

1. *What kinds of students attend the summer session?* Are they the same students who attend during the regular year or are they selected students who wish to accelerate their program or to make up course deficiencies? Are they primarily teachers who attend summer session to improve their background for teaching or to work toward advanced degrees? How many are graduate students?

   Why do these students attend summer session? What do they think of the offerings? Does the program as a whole meet their needs? What do they consider to be its major advantages and disadvantages?

2. *Who teaches summer session courses?* Is the staff made up largely of individuals who teach elsewhere or who held other types of jobs during the regular academic year? Do the younger, less experienced members of the regular university staff do much of the summer teaching? To what extent do established, top-rank staff members teach during the summer? How do summer session and academic-year work compare in the opinions of faculty members?

3. *What kinds of courses are provided in the summer session?* Are they much the same as the courses offered during the regular year or

[2] For a description of the data collection procedures and more detailed findings of the Minnesota studies, see: John E. Stecklein, Mary Corcoran, and E. W. Ziebarth, *The Summer Session: Its Role in the University of Minnesota Program.* Bureau of Institutional Research, University of Minnesota, Report Series No. 1. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bureau of Institutional Research, University of Minnesota, 1958.

do special courses, not ordinarily taught during the regular year, predominate? Do most courses meet in the usual classroom setting or are there more field trips, workshops, or other less formal types of classes?

III

The common impression of faculty, students, and casual visitors to the university campus—that summer students are more mature than those attending during the academic year—was substantiated by the results of the study. The summer students as a whole were older and more likely to be married, and a greater percentage were upper classmen, graduate, or professional school students.

Close to 60 per cent of the summer session students had been enrolled at the University of Minnesota during the previous year—47 per cent on a full-time basis. Eight per cent of the summer students had been enrolled in other colleges and universities during the previous year. Next in numbers to these regular students were those who were teachers or school administrators during the year. High school and elementary school teachers formed the largest proportion of the educators and one-fourth of the total group; school administrators represented three per cent, and college and university personnel accounted for an additional five per cent. Altogether, one-third of the total summer session group were themselves educators during the academic year. Only six per cent had occupations other than teaching, including service in the armed forces.

Why did these students attend summer session? As one would expect, the regularly enrolled college students generally gave educational reasons for their attendance. For many students, attending summer classes meant getting a head start on the next year's work, possibly to shorten the time required to complete a degree; for others, it meant making up work missed during the year. A number of other reasons were also given. Some students said that they liked to attend summer session because they enjoyed the summer session atmosphere; they thought they learned more in the smaller classes; they found their courses more interesting; and they thought that a higher intellectual level prevailed. Others wanted to take courses in a college other than the one they attended during the year.

Teachers were most apt to be interested in completing a program of studies through summer session attendance. Professional advancement was also a factor in the summer session attendance of almost all of the educators, although less than half of them listed this reason as

the *chief* consideration. A good many of both the teaching and other occupational groups wanted to enrich their professional backgrounds by further study and to qualify for advancement in their present fields of work. Personal considerations also figured high in the summer session plans of the educator group, with 71 per cent mentioning such reasons, compared with 41 per cent of the college students and 47 per cent of the noneducational occupations group. The most frequently checked reasons of this type were, "to be able to live at home while attending summer session," "to meet new people, make new friends," and "to take courses for purely personal interest."

The extent to which students make use of the summer session as a period for study was assessed in several ways. The number of terms attended and the course loads carried during the 1956 session provided information about extent of current use. The number of summers of previous attendance at Minnesota and other institutions, and student plans for summer study in the future, also gave some indication of the amount of continuity in summer attendance patterns.

Students had the choice of attending either the first or the second term or both terms of the session. Most students (58 per cent) attended only one term, usually the first, although a good proportion (42 per cent) enrolled both terms. Fifteen per cent attended the second term only.

The usual course load of the students who enrolled for just one term was six or seven credit hours. Students who attended both terms carried a heavier course load during one or both of the terms, taking an average credit load of fifteen hours during the entire summer. As this average credit load indicates, attendance both terms represented approximately the same educational progress as a full quarter of the academic year.

About half of the students enrolled during the summer of 1956 had attended at least one previous summer session at the University of Minnesota. Graduate students were most apt to have attended the Minnesota sessions in the past, typically for two summer sessions. A sizeable proportion of the summer students had also attended a summer session at at least one other institution. This was true of nearly half of the graduate students and of the students enrolled in the College of Education. Plans to attend future Minnesota summer sessions were expressed by half of the students, and about ten per cent indicated that they expected to attend summer sessions at other universities.

IV

The size of the summer session faculty of 1956, as was true of the student enrollment, was about one-third of its academic-year counterpart. Nine of every ten members were drawn from the regular university faculty. The summer faculty was much the same as that of the academic year with respect to rank and degrees, but tended to have more academic experience. Comparative salary distributions showed that more than three-fourths of the summer staff earned more money in the summer than they did for a comparable period during the academic year; however, because of a ceiling on summer session salaries, the highest ranking staff members earned less.

In general the faculty reported that they were engaged in much the same activities during the summer as the rest of the year. Teaching was mentioned most frequently as a major activity. Research and writing, administrative and committee responsibilities, and thesis advising followed in that order. The teaching, research, and service functions served by the various departments were also much the same during the summer as the academic year, with one exception—the training of special groups of students—which a few departments do only during the summer. Differences in the major activities performed by members of various academic ranks were surprisingly small. Major activities varied considerably, however, for the faculties of the various colleges. Whereas teaching continued to be the primary activity of the staffs of most colleges, research and writing received much heavier emphasis in the Institutes of Technology and Agriculture, and less emphasis in the College of Education. In contrast, thesis advising consumed a much greater portion of staff time in the College of Education and the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts in the summer than in the academic year.

V

Perhaps nowhere was the overlap between the summer session and academic-year programs more evident than in the choice of courses. Most of the more than 1,000 different courses offered in the 1956 session were duplicates of academic-year offerings. Eighty per cent of the summer courses scheduled by the five largest colleges had been given at some time during the preceding academic year. Although special offerings, such as field and travel courses, or special course sequences, offered as institutes or workshops or by visiting lecturers,

were featured by some colleges, they constituted less than ten per cent of the courses offered by most of the colleges.

Because summer session attendance is generally not required as part of an educational program, the kind and variety of courses offered at this time is more likely to play an important part in attracting students than during the rest of the year. It is obviously difficult to say which factor comes first, the kinds of courses offered or student needs and preferences, but the two are certainly related. Student interest is not the sole consideration in summer course planning, however. Faculty members sometimes choose to teach courses during the summer in which they have particular interest that cannot be offered during the academic year. Because the choice of courses offered during the summer thus represents the outcome of a variety of administrative judgments about student needs and faculty resources, a study of the courses offered by the various colleges and departments during the summer session added another dimension to the picture of the Minnesota Summer Session program.

Notable differences were found from college to college in the comparative sizes of the summer and academic-year offerings and in the extent to which summer courses were drawn from the academic-year program. Certain of the professional schools, such as the College of Education and the School of Business Administration, offered relatively large summer programs, including as much as one-third of their offerings of the preceding academic year. Two divisions of the College of Medical Sciences, the Medical School and the School of Nursing, which incorporate summer work in their curricula, scheduled summer courses much as they would during an academic-year period.

The College of Science, Literature, and the Arts held an intermediate position with respect to the relative size of its summer and academic-year offerings. The 414 summer courses offered by this college were about one-fifth the number offered during the academic year and included 18 per cent of the courses actually offered by this college during the previous year. Special courses unique to the summer session, such as institutes, field and travel courses, and special courses taught by visiting lecturers accounted for less than ten per cent of the SLA College summer program. The Institutes of Agriculture and Technology both offered comparatively limited summer programs which differed, however, in resemblance to their academic-year offerings. The Institute of Technology emphasized courses for under-

graduates drawn almost entirely from regular course offerings, whereas the Institute of Agriculture emphasized work for graduate students and field courses at the Lake Itasca Biological Station.

Both faculty and student appraisals of summer session courses were obtained. Faculty members pointed to the rapid pace of summer teaching, the upper limit on summer session salaries, the weather, and the lack of time for research and writing as major disadvantages of summer session teaching. On the other hand, the greater stimulation offered by a better motivated group of students was given as an advantage of summer teaching, one reason for the fact that nine per cent of the staff preferred summer teaching and that 44 per cent had no preference for one time over the other.

The features of the summer session most often judged to be outstanding by students were the faculty and certain specific courses. Faculty members were described as outstanding, of high caliber, and up-to-date by some students. The individual attention given to students and the generally good relationships between students and faculty were also commended. The most frequent student criticisms dealt with the brevity of the session or with specific instructors.

Comparisons of summer session and academic-year courses were made by students who had taken course work at the University of Minnesota during both periods. They compared courses taken during the summer and the regular academic year with respect to the amount of work required, the quality of instruction, and the amount learned. Although the summer students on the whole rated their summer courses as about the same as their academic-year courses in the amount of work required, there were some variations from college to college in these ratings. Students in the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts and the Institute of Agriculture were more apt than others to say that their summer courses were more demanding. There was less variation in the ratings by students enrolled in the different colleges as to the quality of instruction that they received, with 60 to 75 per cent of the students saying that their summer course work was about the same as their academic-year courses in this respect. In regard to the amount learned, about 50 per cent of the total group said that they learned about the same amount in their summer session as in their academic-year courses. The remaining half were almost equally divided between persons who said that they learned more and persons who said that they learned less in the summer. Students in the Insti-

tute of Agriculture and the College of Education were inclined more than others to say that they learned more in the summer than during the academic year. Graduate students were more apt to believe they had learned less.

VI

The entire survey of the University of Minnesota Summer Session showed marked increases over the 75 years of its history not only in the number of students served, but also in the variety of programs offered, and in the extent of course offerings. A shift in clientele was also observed, such that the summer student of today is much more likely to be a regularly enrolled college student than was true in the past. This shift in the nature of the student body is one indication of a closer relationship than existed previously between the summer session and the academic-year programs. This relationship is further strengthened by the fact that the vast majority of summer session course offerings and faculty are selected from the courses and the faculty of the academic year. Further evidence that the summer session and the academic-year programs serve many of the same instructional functions is provided by the student and faculty comparisons of summer session and academic-year courses. In terms of almost all the criteria on which the courses were compared, the consensus of both faculty and students was that there were no major differences.

At the same time the number of intensive programs of summer study for individuals in special fields has grown and is likely to continue to expand. Programs similar to the modern language institute, the institutes for high school teachers in mathematics and the sciences, and the workshops for school psychologists and for teachers of exceptional children, which were offered during the summer under study, may be developed for other occupational groups. Greater utilization of the summer session for intellectually gifted high school students may also result from the added interest shown in developing special plans for this group.

Both of the lines of development discussed in the above paragraphs raise questions. If the Minnesota Summer Session and summer sessions generally are to continue to serve an increasing number of academic-year functions, the special contributions of teaching and service traditional to this time period should be carefully reviewed so that important activities will not be squeezed out. The need for in-

service training programs for teachers, institutes and workshops for various groups, and other special offerings must be weighed along with the likely demands for expanded offerings for regular university students.

Administrative arrangements must also be reviewed. A strong case may be made for inclusion of the summer session under the same financial structure which is now used to operate the academic-year program, whether or not the summer period is formally recognized as a fourth quarter or a third semester. However, if serious consideration is to be given to the establishment of the summer as a fourth quarter, a careful study of the effect of a year-round academic schedule on faculty morale and on study and research activities will be necessary. Critical analysis of the distribution of faculty time among teaching, research, and service activities throughout the year might well be included in such a study.

A complex problem thus confronts many American college and university summer sessions. The demand for summer course offerings by regularly enrolled students is increasing. At the same time, the need for special programs developed to serve those individuals who cannot enroll during the academic year has not lessened. The resolution of these dual demands will require a reconsideration of current policies regarding scheduling, faculty, and finance of higher education.